

**BUILDING CHANGE TRUST:
OPEN GOVERNMENT NETWORK NI**

EVALUATION REPORT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Northern Ireland Open Government Network (the OGN) has been one of the key initiatives of the Building Change Trust Creative Space for Civic Thinking programme. The Network links to wider open government initiatives through the UK and Ireland Open Government Action Plans.

The OGN was established in November 2014 to provide a regional focus for both the UK and Ireland action plans going forward, and to directly liaise with the Northern Ireland Executive and departments, local government and civil society in taking forward regional commitments to more open government.

Building Change Trust provided financial support to further the work of the Open Government Network. After a tendering process, Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) was appointed in July 2015 to provide secretarial support to the Network.

The vision and purpose of the Open Government Network in Northern Ireland are to:

- Contribute to delivering more open, transparent and accountable government that empowers citizens to shape decisions that impact on their lives.
- Actively engage a broad and diverse group of citizens and organisations in advocating more open government in Northern Ireland.

This evaluation was carried out two years after its establishment to explore how well it has met its outputs and objectives, in the context of the Creative Space for Civic Thinking programme and make recommendations about the focus for any future support from Building Change Trust.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusions include:

- The project has successfully delivered on 37 of its 39 milestones. The only two milestones it has not delivered on – an awards event and an Assembly all party group on open government – were because different priorities were identified.
- The OGN, NIEL and the staff are very well regarded. Awareness of the project is improving and will be integral to the success of the Network. Activities undertaken have been viewed as successful and professionally organised.
- Members of the OGN, the steering committee and supporters clearly have more confidence in the future of open government and the capacity of the OGN to have an impact. However, continued support for the work of the OGN is essential going forward so that progress made is further enhanced and not lost.

- The OGN has provided a potentially seminal, transformational and successful pilot for BCT with potential long-term impact on open government – and better government - after BCT has ceased operations.
- BCT funding has been critical to the success of the Network to date and the activities. Without BCT support the Network would not have been established and those activities and commitments may not have been started or been made; and it is likely no other funder would have invested in the OGN in the risk-taking way that BCT did.

Recommendations

Arising from the success of the project and feedback to this report, we make a number of key recommendations that include the following.

The Open Government Network should:

- 1) Have a primary focus going forward on the delivery of commitments recently won and on the Sharing and Participation aspects of the ASPIRE model. This includes working with The Department of Finance and BCT; and engaging increasing numbers of people across all sectors as participants in open government initiatives, gain greater traction and enhance its legitimacy to speak to government about open government;
- 2) The Open Government Network should develop a new strategy, building on the successful delivery of the 2014-2017 strategy, that delivers on commitments for BCT until 2018 but explores the post-2018 environment on funding and open government needs;
- 3) Undertake early consultation on designing the potential open government commitments in the next UK Action Plan, due for agreement in mid-2018;
- 4) Help government to deliver on a citizen's budget, develop a pilot open policy making initiative and extend the piloting of participatory budgeting. These are major tasks in the next two years. The time, energy and expertise needed should not be under-estimated but they may help contribute to the legacy of the Building Change Trust from 2018;
- 5) Develop more concrete examples of how open government can benefit government in devising and delivering better policies to gain further supporters and provide real-life examples of why future funders should continue to support the work of the Network;
- 6) Continue to work with elected representatives and key civil society figures to improve open government understanding and knowledge. This includes reinvigorating the Network's engagement with elected representatives to develop

their awareness and understanding of the benefits of open government for local government and policy-making at the Assembly;

- 7) Focus on profile development and increasing participation in Northern Ireland to gain credibility as a representative voice on open government. As part of this the Network may wish to develop criteria around which it will base decisions on when to make public comment, thus helping to standardise its public role regardless of political party or community stance;
- 8) Focus on increasing information and knowledge of citizens on open government, open data and participatory budgeting; and further increase civil society engagement on open government;
- 9) Put effort and resource in to recognition of the good practice in Northern Ireland on a UK, European and international basis – actively seek roles speaking at open government seminars and conferences, writing articles and seeking media opportunity. This is partly strategically to make it more difficult for the Northern Ireland Executive to weaken on their open government commitments; and to increase pressure on the NI Executive to strengthen its commitments further post-2018;
- 10) Lead in the modelling of what a co-design process with government would look like assuming, whether there is a Northern Ireland Executive or not, that the initiative will need to rest with the Network rather than civil service;
- 11) Explore how to deliver pilots with local government, possibly targeting 2/3 local government areas in the next three years to deliver initiatives around, for example, a citizens budget for the Council, participatory budgeting and more open contracting;
- 12) Start to immediately explore resource needs and funding beyond the potential BCT extension. Funding to continue the work is fundamental post-BCT.
- 13) The OGN should take the next 18 months to review and update its structure to ensure the independence of the Network from both Building Change Trust and NIEL as a provider of secretarial support. The OGN will need to develop an identity and governance structure of its own.
- 14) Review the steering committee membership and skills, and develop new induction processes. This may be beneficial for existing steering committee members as well as new ones.
- 15) Approach Building Change Trust for a renewal of funding until 2018, and work to identify with BCT how the Network can best contribute to the promotion of the legacy of the Trust in 2018 and after.

INTRODUCTION

This is the evaluation report for the Northern Ireland Open Government Network supported by the Building Change Trust as part of the Creative Space for Civic Thinking Programme. The evaluation has been carried out by Peter Osborne and Derek Browne.

Building Change Trust

The Building Change Trust (the Trust) was established in 2008 with a BIG Lottery Fund grant of £10million with the purpose of investing in innovation and assisting transformation, community capacity building and promotion of the voluntary, community and social economy sector (VCSE) in Northern Ireland over a ten year period until the end of 2018.

The Trust supports the VCSE in Northern Ireland through the development, delivery of, and learning from, a range of programmes to support the sector to achieve more and better collaboration, increased sustainability and to be a learning sector which identifies, shares and acts on lessons of others' actions. This work is being carried out across five overarching thematic areas: Collaboration, Social Finance Social Innovation, Inspiring Impact and Creating Space for Civic Thinking.

The Creative Space for Civic Thinking (CSCT) programme aims to enable the Northern Ireland VCSE sector to better facilitate meaningful participation of individuals and communities in decision-making processes that impact upon their lives (i.e. civic thinking).

The project has three key strands:



Outcome 1: Support Creativity and Build Capacity

Outcome 2: More Open and Accountable Government

Outcome 3: Sector Independence

The Creative Space for Civic Thinking Programme (CSCT) is about engaging people in the structures and discussions about the issues that affect their everyday lives and creating opportunities for decision makers, influencers and ordinary people together to have a greater say in government policy and decisions.

Finance Minister Simon Hamilton MLA launches the Open Government Network in 2014

In supporting Outcome Two the Building Change Trust helped to establish the Northern Ireland Open Government Network in 2014.

Northern Ireland Open Government Network (the OGN)

The concept of an open government initiative was discussed by Building Change Trust after a visit to an open government event in Dublin in May 2013. After the event BCT facilitated research in to the concept of a Northern Ireland open government network which showed significant need and demand. As a result, and after substantial development work and planning, the Open Government Network (NI) was launched in October 2014.

The Northern Ireland Open Government Network is a loose alliance of individual citizens and representatives of voluntary/community organisations. It aims to work with the NI Executive, government generally, the VCSE and private sector to campaign for a more open form of government making it more transparent, participatory and accountable to the people it serves.

The OGN aims to use the international Open Government Partnership as a vehicle to achieve this objective. It works collaboratively similar civil society networks in the UK and Ireland.

The OGN has a vision “To contribute to delivering more open, transparent and accountable government that empowers citizens to shape decisions that impact on their lives.”

OGN aims to contribute to broadening participation in government; increasing transparency and the availability of, and access to, data; enhancing accountability; improving policy making; delivering better service provision and increasing confidence in government. The Network aims to work in genuine collaboration with the Northern Ireland Executive and government Departments.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation is part of the overall impact assessment for the Creative Space for Civic Thinking programme, of which the establishment of the Open Government Network is part along with the Independence of the Sector report and civic activism programme.

The model for the overall programme is therefore used for this evaluation and for that of the civic activism elements.

Methodology for this evaluation included:

- Interviews with people involved with or associated with the Open Government Network;
- Workshops involving Open Government Network representatives;
- Focus group session with the OGN Steering Committee;
- Consultation with stakeholders;
- VCSE online survey and comparison with a pre-establishment survey of opinions on open government;
- Attendance at Democracy Day;
- Attendance at other events and OGN activities;
- Production of an Interim Indicative Impact Report that was discussed with the OGN representatives and others.

The five specific objectives for the Open Government Network, outlined in the strategic plan approved by Building Change Trust were:

1. Growing the Open Government Network for Northern Ireland;
2. Developing a knowledge about, and a vision for, open government in Northern Ireland;
3. Increasing civic participation in decision-making and in developing services in Northern Ireland;
4. Increasing transparency, openness, availability of information and open data availability in Northern Ireland;
5. Improving standards of integrity in public, political and civic life in Northern Ireland.

Given that the evaluation was carried out as part of an overall assessment of the Creative Space for Civic Thinking programme, a new bespoke framework was developed. The framework is called the **ASPIRE** model. The ASPIRE model is therefore used to help focus the evaluation of the Open Government Network, although not all elements of ASPIRE may be relevant to the evaluation of the Open Government Network.

The basics of the ASPIRE model include:

ASPIRE

Five overall themes are used leading to an overall impact assessment.

These themes are:

- A: Awareness**
- S: Sharing**
- P: Participation**
- I: Influencing**
- R: Resourcing**
- =
- E: Effect or overall impact.**

For each theme three separate indicators will be measured, amounting to 15 indicators in total drawn from the initial overall BCT programme outline.

Awareness:

1. Articulation of the issues or gaps in civic voice;
2. Publicity and promotion of the project and its results;
3. Take up of the project beyond those involved.

Sharing:

4. New approaches and tools tested;
5. Sharing of the new tools;
6. New collaboration between groups/sectors as a result of the BCT programme.

Participation:

7. New groups (primarily within projects);
8. New people (primarily within projects);
9. New relationships between the statutory and VCSE sectors.

Influence:

10. Influenced decision-making process;
11. Increased accountability in decision-making processes;
12. Increased openness in government and in the VCSE sector.

Resources:

13. Has new funding been identified or acquired?
14. What plans are in place for sustainability, if any?
15. Will the project or an aspect of it continue beyond CA support?

Effect:

Overall impact score taking all 15 indicators in to account.

The 15 indicators are provided below:

Awareness of issues and needs

Gaps and issues addressed
Understanding of individual and civil society needs
Promotional activities

Sharing the process, activities and good practice

New approaches tested
Sharing of approaches and what impact?
New collaborations achieved

Participation of new people and groups

New groups involved
New people involved
Take up beyond those usually involved

Influencing governments and decision-makers

How has a project influenced:

Decision-making

Accountability

Openness

Resources for sustainable activity

Has new funding been identified or acquired?

What plans are in place for sustainability, if any?

Will the project or an aspect of it continue beyond CA support?

The 15 performance indicators are used to summarise the work of the Open Government Network in relation to this evaluation later in the report.

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE PROJECT

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) initiative was launched in September 2011 at the United Nations General Assembly, with eight founding countries – the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Mexico, Brazil, Norway, Philippines, Indonesia and South Africa. By 2017 there were over 60 participating countries.

Countries seeking to become a member of the OGP must meet four eligibility criteria although the initiative itself accepts the entry criteria are not rigorously applied with a high entry level bar.

These four criteria are:

- **Fiscal transparency** – timely publication of essential budget documents and an open budget system;
- **Access to information** – information law guaranteeing the public's right to information and access to government data;
- **Disclosures related to elected or senior public officials** – rules requiring public disclosure of income and assets essential to anti-corruption and open, accountable government;
- **Citizen engagement** – citizen participation and engagement in policy-making and governance including basic protection of civil liberties.

Having joined the Open Government Partnership initiative, countries were expected then to:

1. Work with civil society to develop an Open Government Partnership national action plan;
2. Implement Open Government Partnership commitments in accordance with the action plan timeline;
3. Prepare an annual self-assessment report;
4. Participate in the independent reporting mechanism research process;
5. Contribute to peer-learning across the Open Government Partnership.

Therefore, the national action plans of participating countries are expected to involve civil society organisations, be ambitious and keep the country moving forward in open government terms to implement commitments made.

The Open Government Partnership also sets five grand challenges for members including:

- Improving public services;
- Increasing public integrity;
- More effectively managing public resources;
- Creating safer communities;
- Increasing corporate accountability.

The UK published its first national action plan in September 2011. The second national action plan was published in October 2013 for the period 2013-2015, and the existing action plan was published in 2016. It is embedded within the Cabinet Office which leads in the roll out of the action plan that includes commitments by other government departments.

The Irish Government joined the OGP initiative in July 2014 and published its first and current national action plan in July 2014 for the period 2014-2016.

In both the UK and Ireland, those involved accept the process is evolving and will become more inclusive and ambitious as the initiative matures. That includes the involvement and impact of the VCSE sector as a partner in the process.

While still in its early stages in the UK and Ireland there is much potential for further engagement with citizens, greater accessibility for the public, more public use of open data, and potential for cross-border sharing of practice and knowledge.

In this context the Northern Ireland Open Government Network was established in October 2014, facilitated by Building Change Trust, to provide a regional focus for both the UK and Ireland action plans going forward, and to directly liaise with the Northern Ireland Executive and departments, local government and civil society in taking forward regional commitments to more open government. Building Change Trust provided financial support to further the work of the Open Government Network. Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) was appointed in July 2015 to provide administrative and strategic support to the Network.

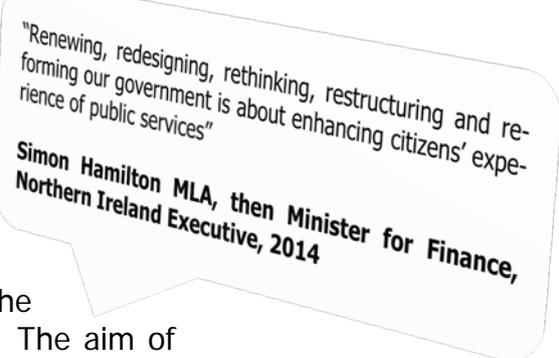
The vision and purpose of the Open Government Network in Northern Ireland are to:

- Contribute to delivering more open, transparent and accountable government that empowers citizens to shape decisions that impact on their lives.
- Actively engage a broad and diverse group of citizens and organisations in advocating more open government in Northern Ireland.

CONTEXT

While the Office of the First and deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) is the regional equivalent of the UK Cabinet Office within the Northern Ireland Executive, the lead department bringing forward a reform agenda in Northern Ireland is the Department of Finance (DFP). The Minister is being advised by a Ministerial Advisory Council with specialists from outside Northern Ireland as well as within.

In a speech to the annual conference of the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) on 25th September 2014, the then Minister of Finance and Personnel, Simon Hamilton MLA outlined his thinking on public sector reform. In the speech he said that “the problem with a proposition for reform that is built purely on the necessity of cuts is that it doesn’t inspire”. The aim of reform was more than that: “renewing, redesigning, rethinking, restructuring and reforming our government is about enhancing citizens’ experience of public services”.



“Renewing, redesigning, rethinking, restructuring and reforming our government is about enhancing citizens’ experience of public services”
Simon Hamilton MLA, then Minister for Finance, Northern Ireland Executive, 2014

The Minister outlined ten core principles for reform which included:

- Openness, relating to data and policy development especially with the charitable and community sectors;
- Innovation;
- Outcome focus;
- Collaboration;
- Partnerships;
- Prevention;
- Competitiveness;
- Technological advances;
- Talent;
- Culture.¹

The Open Government Partnership process had little coverage or traction in Northern Ireland in 2014. The delivery of aspects of 21 commitments contained in the 2013-2015 UK action plan was, therefore, of limited impact in Northern Ireland or any of the other devolved regions.

Consequently, as the United Kingdom developed its third action plan to be published by 2016, it started to reflect on linkage to the regional assemblies and the traction of the process as a whole within the devolved areas.

¹ Speech by Minister Simon Hamilton MLA at CIPFA annual conference 25th September 2014

The latest UK action plan includes commitments from the devolved areas that are more specific than they have ever been, with an expectation that they will become more ambitious in future plans.

The Open Government Network, established in 2014, worked hard to be part of the process that developed the commitments in Northern Ireland conscious that the concept was still relatively new to Northern Ireland and its civil servants, and the deadline for 2016 was tight especially considering it was a brand new organisation.

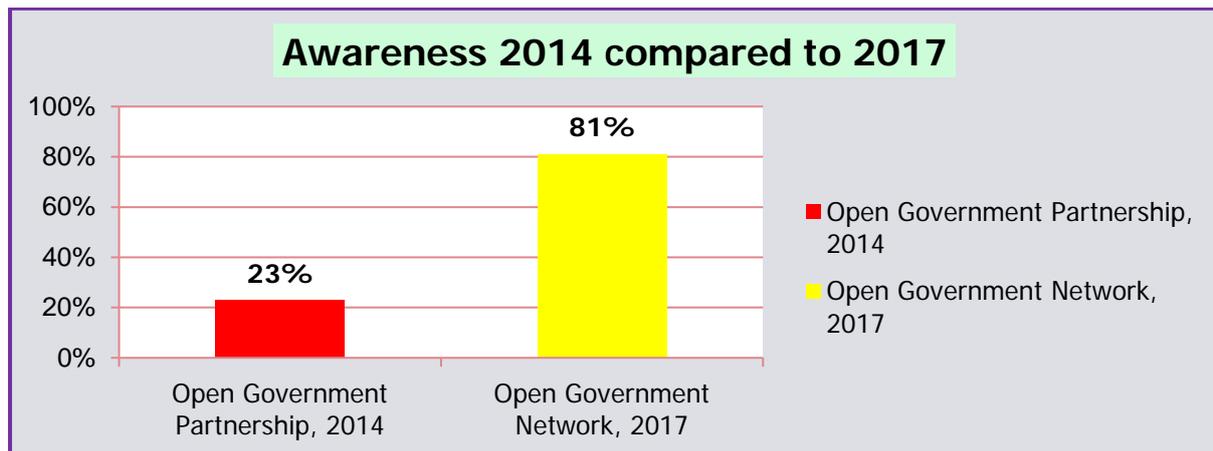
- Event organisation and management: handling all logistics associated with OGN events, including organising speakers, facilitating/presenting where required, publicity, and other relevant duties;
- Public affairs and advocacy: facilitating effective engagement between the OGN and government including the NI Executive, NI Government Departments, relevant public agencies, local councils and elected representatives – this would include identifying appropriate contact points, preparing and distributing communications materials (subject to OGN approval), setting up meetings, and other relevant duties;
- Marketing and communications: maintaining regular content on the OGN's social media channels, establishment and maintenance of an OGN website including soliciting content from members and others; development of materials to publicise and grow the OGN;
- Secretarial and administrative support: assisting with the smooth functioning of the Steering Committee including organising monthly meetings, communicating with members, taking minutes, as well as organising the annual OGN conference for all members;
- Finance: effective management of the OGN budget including dual reporting on expenditure to both the OGN Steering Committee and Building Change Trust.

NIEL were also expected to adopt a proactive approach to identifying and bringing the OGN Steering Committee's attention to new opportunities for the network to grow, develop and achieve its aims.

NIEL were required to appoint a full-time OGN Coordinator to oversee all aspects of the work, as well as manage the relationships with the OGN Steering Committee and Building Change Trust.

COMPARISONS

The Open Government Network (NI) was established just two years ago but already demonstrates some significant impact in terms of awareness and delivery. The quantitative comparisons below are between a survey of the VCSE sector in 2014 and 2017. While a health warning needs applied regarding the number of respondents (187 in 2014 compared to 49 in 2017) and who replied, the results are still instructive and interesting.

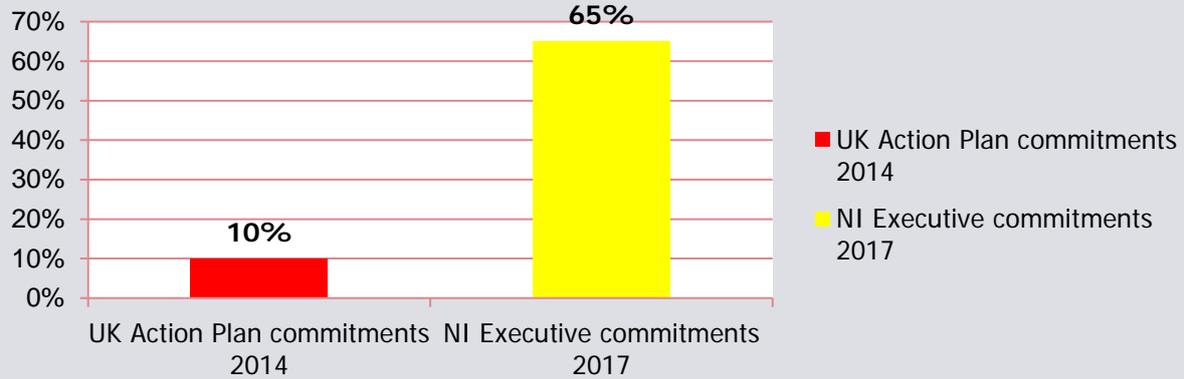


While a direct comparison cannot be made between the Open Government Partnership (OGP) and the Open Government Network, on paper the OGP incorporated the interests of Northern Ireland in the development of the UK Open Government Action Plan in 2014. The significant disparity between the OGP at 23% awareness in 2014 and the 81% awareness for the OGN in 2017, perhaps also indicates an increased awareness of open government issues and the work of the Network.

The awareness of the Open Government Network, regardless of the comparison, is very high at 81%.

As the table below also shows while in 2014 just 10% were aware that the UK Government had agreed its second Open Government Partnership action plan, by 2017 65% of those replying were aware of the Northern Ireland Executive commitments to the UK Open Government Action Plan.

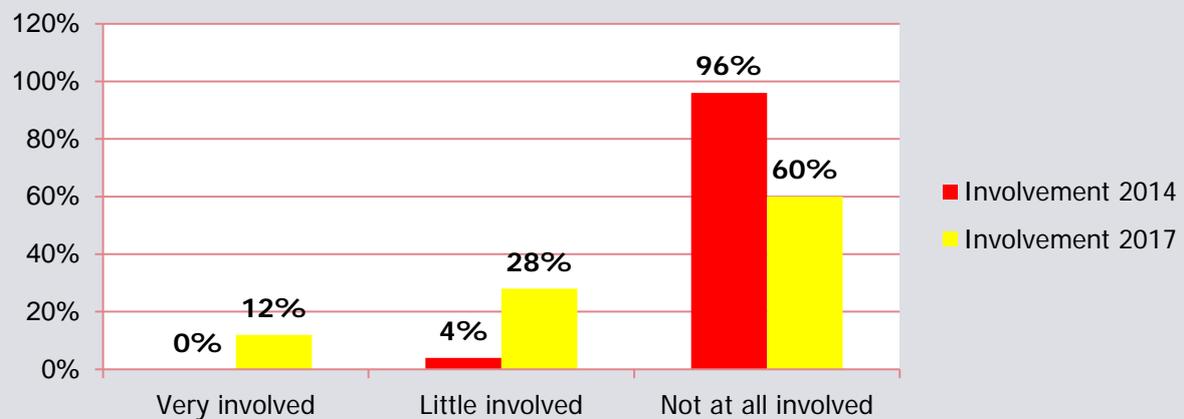
Awareness of commitments 2014 compared to 2017



The Northern Ireland Executive, as well as the OGN, should be pleased at the high level of awareness of Northern Ireland central government commitments to open government.

The survey also highlights much greater VCSE involvement in shaping or influencing the open government commitments in 2014 compared to 2017.

Involvement 2014 compared to 2017



No one replying in 2014 felt very involved in shaping open government commitments compared to 12% in 2017. While, in 2014, just 4% felt at least some involvement in shaping open government commitments, nearly half (40%) felt at least some involvement in 2017.

This may also reflect the benefit of the devolved region getting involved on an issue such as open government rather than relying on its local interests being met by Whitehall-focused policy-making.

Having an open government campaign in Northern Ireland in 2017 was considered very important by 76% and fairly important by the remaining 24%. No one at all

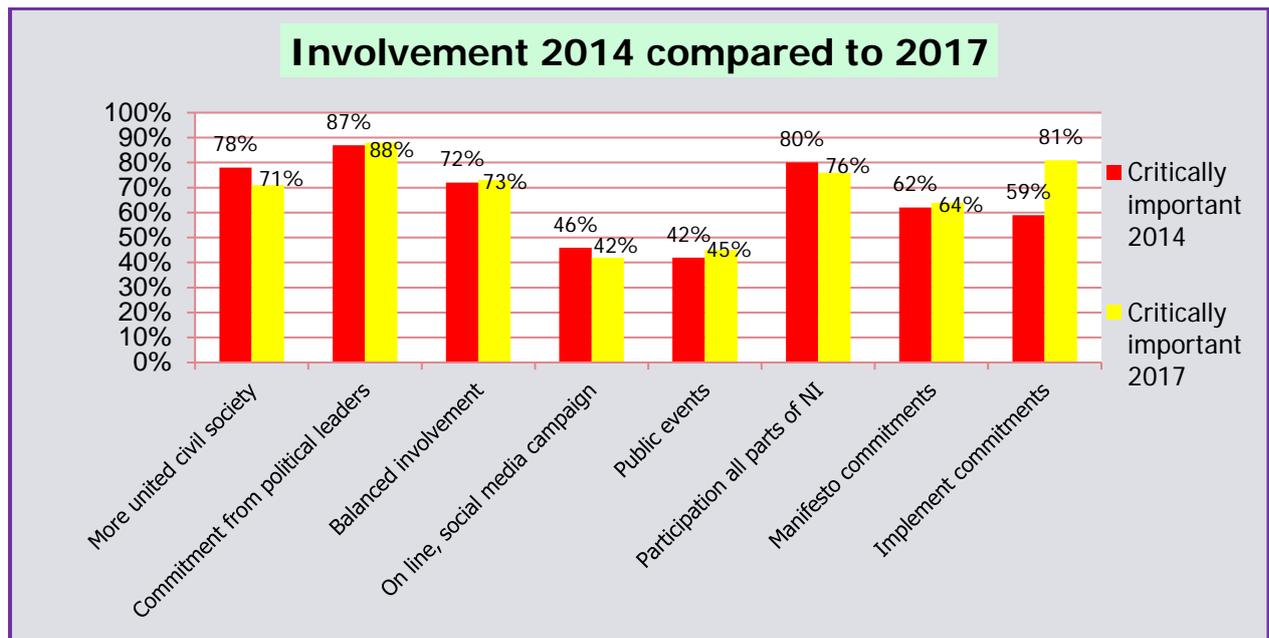
(0%) thought an open government campaign in Northern Ireland was not at all important.

Feeding back on particular aspects of that open government campaign, respondents in 2017 were similar in view to those 2014 respondents, as reflected in the table below.

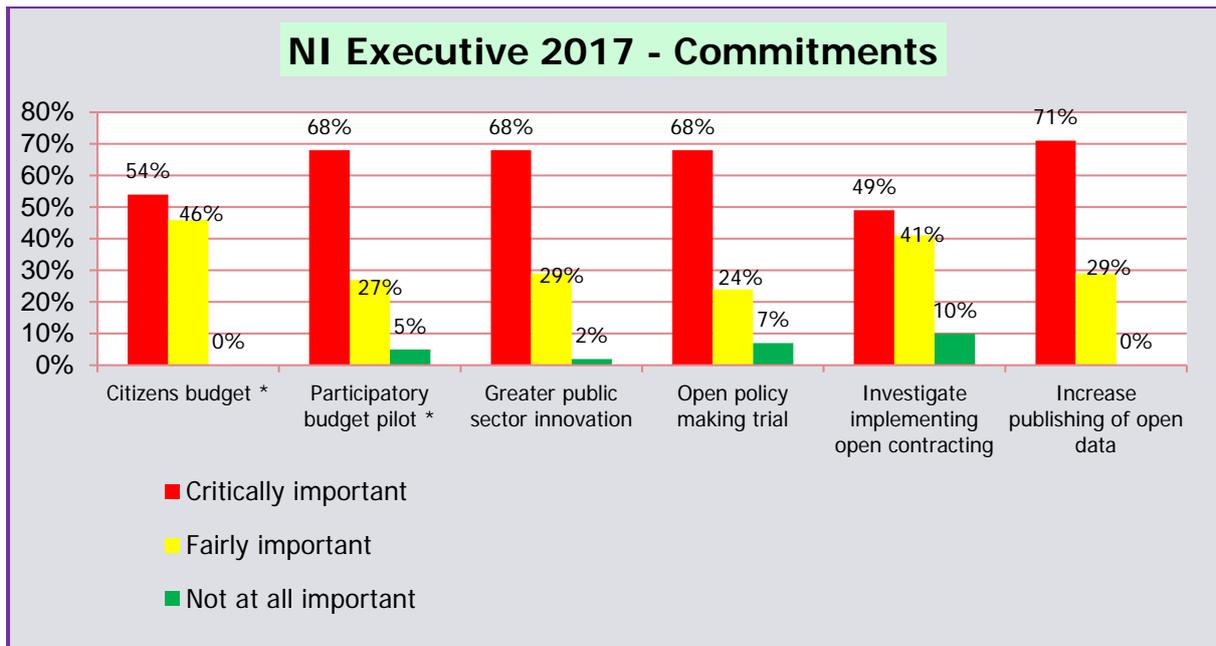
However, many more respondents in 2017 (81%) thought that ensuring the implementation of existing open government commitments by the NI Executive was critically important, compared to 59% of respondents in 2014 who thought implementing the UK commitments was critical.

The table may reflect a greater prioritisation for implementing commitments by a region with a devolved administration where the commitments have been made locally, or it may reflect a frustration at lack of implementation to date.

In addition, in 2017, 66% felt it critically important to ensure that good practice in Northern Ireland was recognised – 0% thought recognising good practice in Northern Ireland wasn't at all important.



Respondents were asked how important each of the six commitments made by the Northern Ireland Executive was to open government. The importance of each was high, possibly with the exception of the commitment to investigate implementation of open contracting standards.



* These two commitments were not included in the national action plan but were agreed by The Executive and Ministers

Other comments relating to the existing commitments and work of the Open Government Network included:

- The need to reinforce the importance of awareness raising of the issues and work;
- Concern that the work was centred on Belfast;
- Changing the perception that government in Northern Ireland is not interested in openness, which is primarily a challenge for government itself;
- Concern to raise the legitimacy and representativeness of the Network.

Conclusions:

The Open Government Network has achieved a lot in two years, including raising awareness of its work and of the commitments made by the Northern Ireland Executive.

However, looking ahead to future UK open government action plan commitments, for a region as small as Northern Ireland, the Network should seek to raise higher still the number of people feeling involved in setting the open government commitments by 2020.

Implementation of those commitments, continuing to gain support and enhance its legitimacy as a voice and representative organisation for civil society remains important – but in just two years it has also made advances in these areas.

More people are involved in open government work, exploring its uses and working with the Network. The Network should embrace the importance of collaboration with the VCSE, business, trades union and other sectors and with local and central government.

RELEVANCE

There were five specified outcomes of the project that were the focus for delivery.

They were:

- 1) Growing the Open Government Network for Northern Ireland;
- 2) Developing a knowledge about, and a vision for, open government in Northern Ireland;
- 3) Increasing civic participation in decision-making and in developing services in Northern Ireland;
- 4) Increasing transparency, openness, availability of information and open data availability in Northern Ireland;
- 5) Improving standards of integrity in public, political and civic life in Northern Ireland.

However, the evaluation is also carried out in the context of the overall Creative Space for Civic Thinking programme using the bespoke ASPIRE model referenced earlier:

Awareness:

Overall score awarded to the Open Government Network under awareness was 7 out of ten.

1. Articulation of the issues or gaps in civic voice

The Open Government Network has undertaken a survey of the VCSE, engaged with the sector in a series of open government focused workshops and events, and attended many events organised by others in the VCSE. The Network has represented those views of the sector to government in its many dealings with the DfF as it has worked through priorities for commitments in the new devolved action plan commitments.

Many consultees believed that the Open Government Network had played an important role in advocating for more openness in government, able to articulate clearly with examples of the benefits of more openness to government as well as to civil society. However, it was also suggested by several that the OGN had a greater role in the future in publicly advocating for greater openness which needed linked to credibility regarding numbers of people the Network represented.

2. Publicity and promotion of the project and its results

The Network has undertaken awareness-raising at a large number of events and festivals, some that it organised and some organised by others. The Network has developed a web and social media presence and significantly increased numbers of people engaging with it.

Events are summarised elsewhere but include membership events, workshops on specialist aspects of open government such as open data and participatory budgeting, and engagement events such as Democracy Day with the Imagine festival.



Putting democracy on trial at the 2017 Imagine Belfast festival

Several consultees suggested that Building Change Trust was a critical funder at this stage of the Network's development given that BCT was not dependent on funding from government. However, finding support that allowed such flexibility for the Network in years to come may be more problematic especially if the Network grows in strength and is expected to be challenging of government.

3. Take up of the project beyond those involved

The OGN has worked with a significant number of people not previously engaged on open government including young people, older people and public/civil servants and politicians. Several hundred people have participated in Network activities in the last two years. Pilots with Triangle Housing, Democracy Day activities and work with some Council's also evidence this open approach that has involved many people new to the issue.

Consultees considered there to be widespread untapped need and potential for the work of the Network within civil society in Northern Ireland, but also thought the specialised nature of the issues made mass participation more difficult.

The Network has attended a number of international events taking the progress made in Northern Ireland to groups and people that would not before have engaged with Northern Ireland. There has been significant international interest in progress made in Northern Ireland, partly due to the nature of the peace process. The relationship of improving open government to the peace-building efforts of many linking civil society and government is important. Further promoting international understanding of Northern Ireland as an area utilising open government as part of the peace-building

efforts and as an area of good practise that has much to teach others, is an important aspect for the future.

Sharing:

Overall score awarded to the Open Government Network under sharing was 7 out of ten.

4. New approaches and tools tested

The Open Government Network has led the way in piloting innovation in aspects of open government. This has included the pilot of participatory budgeting at a social housing scheme that may now be extended to other social housing providers. It also engaged nearly 100 young people at a participatory democracy day event with Belfast Metropolitan Collage. The Network put democracy on trial as part of Democracy Day at the Imagine Festival, with 150 people voting as a citizens jury at the end of the trial. Democracy was acquitted.



Judge, prosecution and defence at the Open Government Network trial of democracy

However, the Network also recognises that more could be done especially in developing an understanding of the concept of open government, open data and participatory budgeting.

New tools have been used by the Network including participatory budgeting, open data and advocating a citizens budget that has been accepted by the Minister. Many other open government commitments have been made by the Northern Ireland Executive indicating success in broaching new approaches to open government by government.

In just two years the Network has made significant impact on the open government environment and approaches and tools used in government, local government and with the VCSE.

5. Sharing of the new tools

The Network has hosted a number of sharing seminars and well attended meetings. It has circulated a range of activities and information through its web pages and social media.

Partnering with existing festivals has been an important part of the sharing – such as Imagine Belfast – although some consultees also queried the depth of the learning by participants in those events.

However, all consultees acknowledged the long-term nature of the initiative, the relatively short time the Network has been in existence and the gains made in that time having laid a firm foundation.

6. New collaboration between groups/sectors as a result of the BCT programme

The OGN has engaged in a new way with central government gaining many commitments for the UK open government action plan, with local government gaining some in principal interest, and with the VCSE including Fold, Imagine Belfast and Belfast Metropolitan College. The Network has worked closely with organisations such as the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) and the Rural Community Network (RCN).

Deepening that collaboration, especially with concrete open government initiatives, may be for the next phase in the development of the Network.

Participation:

Overall score awarded to the Open Government Network under participation was 7 out of ten.

7. New groups (primarily within projects)

The Network has introduced the concept of open government, and various tools, to new groups and organisations including Fold and young students at Belfast Met. They have also introduced some new concepts and relationships to the Department of Finance personnel (e.g. citizen's budget and the Cabinet Office role in open government) and local government.

8. New people (primarily within projects)

The Network Steering Committee has attracted a range of people from within civil society, including a virtually new Steering Committee since the establishment of the Network in 2014. The Network has engaged with young people, older people and various other sectors in a targeted way and also with various other audiences within the VCSE including people in social housing and NICVA.

Membership of the Open Government Network in Northern Ireland has increased to over 330 in April 2017, compared to 35 in Wales and 177 in Scotland, and 898 in the UK as a whole. Northern Ireland membership is therefore well in excess of that in Wales and Scotland, despite having a smaller population, and accounts for 37% of total UK membership. This is also reflected in the numbers of “conversations” or debates started in each region – 52 by the UK-wide Network, eight by Wales, 63 by Scotland and 169 by the Northern Ireland Network. In other words, the Open Government Network NI, on the OGN UK website, has started more conversation threads than the UK, Scotland and Wales put together.

There are also 1,143 people engaged with the Open Government Network NI through Twitter. This compares with 1,798 Twitter followers of the UK Open Government Network.

Many new people have been engaged for the first time, but those on whom the Network will have had a lasting impact will include political parties and representatives, civil servants and public servants in central and local government. It is important to continue to acknowledge that the process of building awareness of and commitment to, more open government will be longer term.

9. New relationships between the statutory and VCSE sectors

The Network does accept, however, that it needs to do more to raise its profile and awareness of it within the VCSE sector. Further engagement and participation needs to be a renewed part of its planning in years to come, including addressing issues of legitimacy in speaking for and with civil society.

Influencing:

Overall score awarded to the Open Government Network under influencing was 9 out of ten.

10. Influenced decision-making process

The commitments made by the Northern Ireland Executive are an important milestone and significant achievement for the Open Government Network in such a short space of time. To acquire such a policy commitment from the Northern Ireland Executive is a first important step that the Network needs to consolidate if resources allow. Currently this is in the context of the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive and amid efforts to re-form it with openness and transparency at the heart of reasons for its collapse due to the mishandling of a renewable heat incentive scheme.

The engagement with political parties has been helpful and there was ample coverage provided to the OGN in gaining commitments from the main political parties to openness in donations to their political party. It remains to be seen whether those commitments are followed through in order to help enact change-making legislation if devolution is restored.

The Network has helped shift some of the language around accountability and openness used in public. It has had impact on political party donations commitments and has been instrumental in the commitment by two political parties (Sinn Fein and the SDLP) to advocate a lobbying bill in their party manifestos.

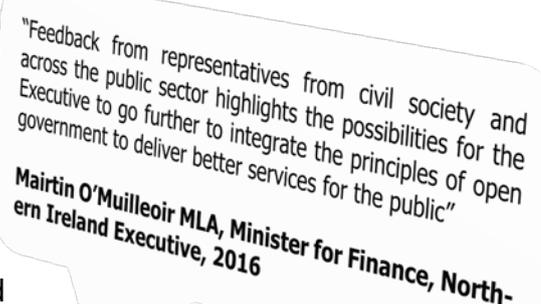
Consultees often reiterated the long-term nature of the role of the Network and how much has been achieved in a short space of time.

The Open Government Network NI is represented on the UK-wide Open Government steering committee.

11. Increased accountability in decision-making processes

In November 2016 the Open Government Network was the principal advocate in helping the Northern Ireland Executive to agree a number of open government commitments. These would be included as part of the current UK Open Government action plan. The then Minister for Finance, Mairtin O'Muilleoir MLA, said

"[F]eedback from representatives from civic society and across the public sector highlights possibilities for the Executive to go further to integrate the principles of open government to deliver better services to the public. In recognition of this the Executive has agreed to key open government commitments aimed at enhancing public engagement and enabling improved service delivery across Executive departments." In the same news release, the Open Government Network chair, Colm Burns, is quoted as saying "We are pleased that the Exec-



"Feedback from representatives from civil society and across the public sector highlights the possibilities for the Executive to go further to integrate the principles of open government to deliver better services for the public"

Mairtin O'Muilleoir MLA, Minister for Finance, Northern Ireland Executive, 2016

utive has agreed Northern Ireland-specific commitments as part of the Open Government National Action Plan. These commitments have been co-designed by government and citizens. We look forward to working with the Department on implementation of the commitments”.

These specific commitments included:

- Involvement in developing an open data strategy for Northern Ireland;
- Involvement in open by default procedures to increase collaboration on FoI requests;
- A citizens budget to accompany the formal budget when produced by the DfP;
- A pilot on open policy making;
- Increased usage of open data by government departments;
- More open contracting.

In just two years, the achievement of these commitments has been a seminal achievement by the Open Government Network. Focussing on ensuring their implementation is the next major challenge.

12. Increased openness in government and in the VCSE sector

The Network has piloted a participatory budgeting process within a social housing scheme and has received a commitment that social housing providers will incorporate further initiatives in to their engagement with tenants. A principle agreement to hold a participatory budgeting initiative has been made by Ards and North Down Borough Council. It is being explored with Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, and Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council. It is hoped a pilot participatory budgeting scheme will be launched in



The NI Open Government Network spoke at the Paris summit on open government

2017.

Resourcing/Sustainability:

Overall score awarded to the Open Government Network under resourcing/sustainability was 9 out of ten.

13. Has new funding been identified or acquired

The Network has enjoyed a two-year funding package of support from Building Change Trust and has already started to discuss an extension of that support until the end of 2018. There is a strong case for such funding given the success of the Network since 2014 that has included commitments on open government from the Northern Ireland Executive and others in local government and within the VCSE.

In addition, the Network, and NIEL, have been working with Involve UK in acquiring BIG Lottery Fund UK support for additional open government work on sustainability. While part-only participants of a UK-wide initiative it is an indication of potential other funding sources. It also helps to promote outside Northern Ireland the good practice of open government commitments facilitated by the NI Open Government Network.

14. Plans are in place for sustainability, if any

The Network is liaising with Building Change Trust for further support for the remainder of the lifetime of BCT – until the end of 2018. The OGN does need to give serious consideration to how it is resourced after 2018. The nature of that funding is important to its independence and ability to challenge government.

The skills and knowledge of open government of members of the Network, including the Steering Committee, have been enhanced considerably and will be a sustainable resource beyond their involvement with the Open Government Network.

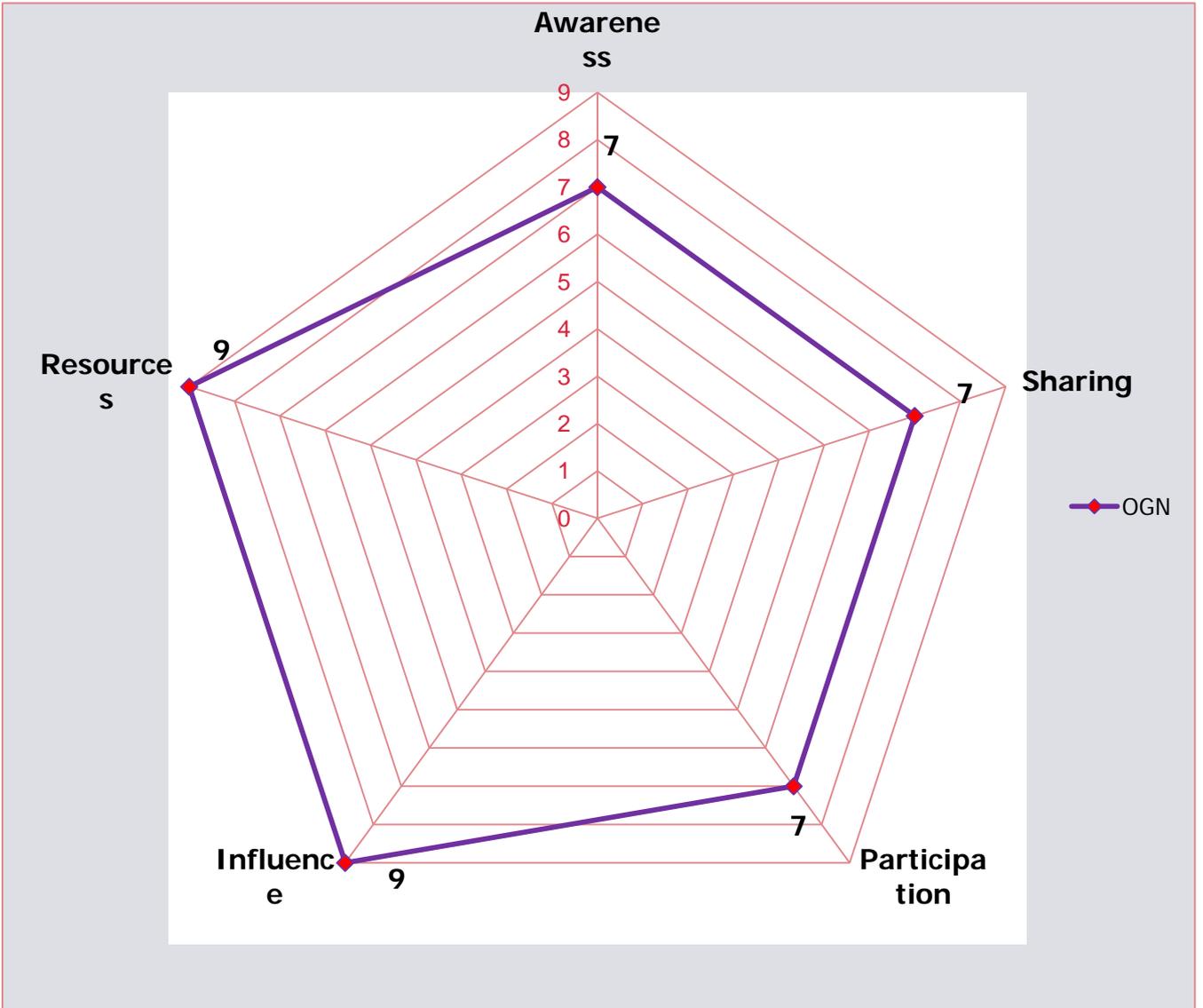
There is sustainability about the knowledge and information people acquired when engaged with the Network, whether in the VCSE, local or central government.

15. Continuation beyond CTCA support

A major challenge for the Network will be how it continues its work at the level that it has started, supported by NIEL, after Building Change Trust funding is no longer available. The Network needs to seriously prepare for that scenario which will happen from the end of 2018 onwards.

Radial Chart

The scores allocated to the Open Government Network using the ASPIRE model therefore allows for the creation of a radial chart of the project as below – scores are averaged out of ten.



The radial scoring, at a glance, indicates that:

- The Network strength in influencing government and the potential for receiving future support;
- Work on participation and sharing should be enhanced in its next iteration, especially in relation to its representativeness, legitimacy to speak for and with citizens from across all sectors and through even further membership increases.

SWOT ANALYSIS

The SWOT analysis below summarises many points made during the consultation process.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Reputation, trust and goodwill of OGN staff, steering committee and NIEL; ○ Good will by many stakeholders and partners in the VCSE; ○ Delivery of short-term achievements such as the commitments from the Executive; ○ Knowledge and expertise; ○ Has started to change the language in public discourse around open government and accountability; ○ Willingness of practitioners on the staff and steering committee; ○ Ability to draw on knowledge and advice from open government practitioners outside Northern Ireland; ○ Policy support at a high level in the UK and Irish governments; 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Lack of evidence of potential value for money given the qualitative and long-term nature of the work; ○ Short-term in operation with questions around legitimacy about whom the Network speaks on behalf of; ○ Lack of awareness of open government initiatives and its benefits within government (central and local), and the VCSE; ○ Relative lack of engagement still by political parties and politicians; ○ Possible dependence on a few individuals to lead the steering committee and Network.
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Working through on the existing commitments and demonstrating their success; ○ Developing good practice in a region still working through its peace process in which, as has been evidenced very recently, transparency in many aspects of it (RHI and legacy) is crucial; ○ International, UK and Irish support; ○ Increasing understanding and awareness of the importance of open data; ○ Independent monitoring exercise of UK commitments soon to be started by the OGP; ○ Closeness of the local political environment and access to senior politicians and Ministers. 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Loss of key personnel; ○ Criticism on credibility and representativeness; ○ Lack of long-term funding that supports independence from government; ○ Tightening of the fiscal environment; ○ Loss of support from NIEL; ○ Lack of buy-in from politicians; ○ Indifference from civil servants who may not be pushed by local Ministers; ○ Local government doesn't engage with something it finds different or challenging; ○ Lack of a Northern Ireland Executive to push forward on recently won commitments.

Summary

There was pro-active identification and management of risks during the programme.

The SWOT analysis also identifies:

- The importance of identifying potential funding in the near future;
- Importance of further delivery on, and development of, existing commitments won;
- Political engagement as critical in the future;
- Continuing to pressure the Northern Ireland Executive/politicians/civil servants to advance the open government agenda while fulfilling existing commitments;
- The need to increase membership, representatives and therefore legitimacy of the Network to speak for and with the VCSE.

Towards the end of the two years, and taking in to account the management of risks and threats identified, the Open Government Network now has:

- A substantial and positive reputation;
- A background, knowledge and experience of open government;
- Track record of completing and delivering projects on time, and in line with funding deadlines;
- A tight, energetic and more confident team capable of delivering value for money;
- Increased confidence and ambition for delivering further far-reaching and significant initiatives with an impact on central and local government, the civil service and policy development.

However, the OGN also needs to recognise and plan for overcoming some of the identified threats, including its dependence on key personnel, need for further resourcing, and potential lack of engagement from public agencies, politicians and the VCSE.

Relationship building, understanding of open government and gaining policy commitments from Departments and engaging public agencies were critical to the success of the project.

It is difficult to assess value for money within this type of delivery for a project, or the value economically to the public agencies, but the project is regarded as of high value by them during interviews and critical to continued delivery of services going forward.

There has been very substantial learning and value-adding work beyond the outputs initially identified for the project.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As has been outlined already throughout this report, and in the appendices with the traffic light system, the project has been highly successful, meeting the targets set and exceeding some of the targets.

Outputs have been achieved. Given the long-term nature of the outcomes, it will be impossible to assess the impact of some for many years to come. This was made clear at the start of the project – that the project was laying a foundation for the future development of open government in Northern Ireland.

In addition, sustainability is difficult to measure at this stage because it incorporates that future use of knowledge and skills developed and the future use of materials, as well as economic return on a number of open government initiatives.

It is very clear from interviews and from reaction of those involved that there have been important links forged between the OGN, the VCSE and government both central and local. Regardless of the strong working relationships between those involved the benefits have been clear and mutually beneficial.

The OGN, NIEL and staff are well regarded, their leadership and approach are seen as important factors in the overall success of the project.

There were publications, attendance at events, speaking at events and engagement with the media. These included:

- The launch of the Open Government Network;
- Democracy Day and other outreach events;
- OGN video and promotional material;
- Campaign of openness in political party donations;
- Specific commitments made by the Minister for Finance and Northern Ireland Executive.

The OGN has provided a potentially seminal, transformational and successful pilot for BCT with potential long-term impact on open government after BCT has ceased operations.



**Open Government Network
NI brochure setting out its
aims**

The project itself has produced a plan for the continued development of the Network, the delivery of open government commitments and growth of the Network.

In a two-year period, which is a relatively short period of time, the Open Government Network has achieved significant successes.

The main drivers of the Network – voluntary officers of the Network and Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL) as providing development support - are getting increasingly confident in their knowledge and ability to deliver.

There has been a substantial turn-over in steering committee membership during that time, but those now involved seem enthusiastic and active committee members. OGN may need to give further consideration, however, to their knowledge levels and revisit the induction process for new members.

OGN has a high regard for the support provided by NIEL – although both they and NIEL should ensure there is not too much comfortable focus on environment matters, speakers; and should guard against that perception externally.

Support from BCT has been of critical importance and the involvement of a BCT officer with the steering committee – who has knowledge and enthusiasm – is appreciated. The relationship may need formalised, however, going forward.

The OGN has recently delivered a number of commitments from the Northern Ireland Executive regarding open government, including initiatives that will be part of the UK-wide Open Government Action Plan. While the commitments are expected to be less substantial than those of the Scottish Government, the OGN in Northern Ireland is better linked to the VCSE than its counterpart in Scotland. OGN commitments are more ambitious than those in Wales. The OGN NI could be developed as a model of good practice providing learning for counterparts in the UK and further afield.

The OGN needs to strengthen and deepen its roots within the VCSE and NI community. It needs to further build local credibility as a partner with government in delivering open government commitments.

The OGN may wish to ensure in its plans going forward are perceived as covering all of Northern Ireland not just the Belfast urban area.

Conclusions

Given the summary of activities and the achievement of milestones, conclusions include:

- The project has successfully delivered on 37 of its 39 milestones. The only two milestones it has not delivered on – an awards event and an Assembly all party group on open government – were because different priorities were identified. The Northern Ireland Assembly has had two elections during that time and it is currently unclear whether it will continue to function.

- The OGN, NIEL and the staff are very well regarded. Awareness of the project is improving and will be integral to the success of the Network. Activities undertaken have been viewed as successful and professionally organised.
- Members of the OGN, the steering committee and supporters clearly have more confidence in the future of open government and the capacity of the OGN to have an impact. However, continued support for the work of the OGN is essential going forward so that progress made is further enhanced and not lost.
- Competence of the OGN Steering Committee has increased and additional members are participating. The Committee has taken on new, enterprising ideas and initiatives which are starting to bear fruit.
- The OGN is viewed by departments and public agencies as an expert organisation albeit still with queries about representation and legitimacy.
- The OGN has provided a potentially seminal, transformational and successful pilot for BCT with potential long-term impact on open government – and better government - after BCT has ceased operations.
- BCT funding has been critical to the success of the Network to date and the activities. Without BCT support the Network would not have been established and those activities and commitments may not have been started or been made; and it is likely no other funder would have invested in the OGN in the risk-taking way that BCT did.

Recommendations

Arising from the success of the project and feedback to this report, we make the following ten key recommendations. The Open Government Network should:

- 1) Have a primary focus going forward on the delivery of commitments recently won and on the Sharing and Participation aspects of the ASPIRE model. This includes working with The Department of Finance and BCT; and engaging increasing numbers of people across all sectors as participants in open government initiatives, gain greater traction and enhance its legitimacy to speak to government about open government;
- 2) The Open Government Network should develop a new strategy, building on the successful delivery of the 2014-2017 strategy, that delivers on commitments for BCT until 2018 but explores the post-2018 environment on funding and open government needs;
- 3) Undertake early consultation on designing the potential open government commitments in the next UK Action Plan, due for agreement in mid-2018;
- 4) Help government to deliver on a citizen's budget, develop a pilot open policy making initiative and extend the piloting of participatory budgeting. These are major tasks in the next two years. The time, energy and expertise needed should not be under-estimated but they may help contribute to the legacy of the Building Change Trust from 2018;
- 5) Develop more concrete examples of how open government can benefit government in devising and delivering better policies to gain further supporters and provide real-life examples of why future funders should continue to support the work of the Network;
- 6) Continue to work with elected representatives and key civil society figures to improve open government understanding and knowledge. This includes reinvigorating the Network's engagement with elected representatives to develop their awareness and understanding of the benefits of open government for local government and policy-making at the Assembly;
- 7) Focus on profile development and increasing participation in Northern Ireland to gain credibility as a representative voice on open government. As part of this the Network may wish to develop criteria around which it will base decisions on when to make public comment, thus helping to standardise its public role regardless of political party or community stance;

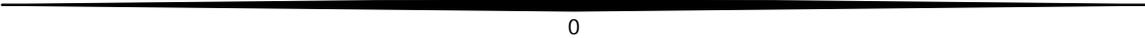


The need for the Open Government Network to develop the knowledge and skills of those in central and local government, including public and civil servants, continues.

- 8) Focus on increasing information and knowledge of citizens on open government, open data and participatory budgeting; and further increase civil society engagement on open government;
- 9) Put effort and resource in to recognition of the good practice in Northern Ireland on a UK, European and international basis – actively seek roles speaking at open government seminars and conferences, writing articles and seeking media opportunity. This is partly strategically to make it more difficult for the Northern Ireland Executive to weaken on their open government commitments; and to increase pressure on the NI Executive to strengthen its commitments further post-2018;
- 10) Lead in the modelling of what a co-design process with government would look like assuming, whether there is a Northern Ireland Executive or not, that the initiative will need to rest with the Network rather than civil service;
- 11) Explore how to deliver pilots with local government, possibly targeting 2/3 local government areas in the next three years to deliver initiatives around, for example, a citizens budget for the Council, participatory budgeting and more open contracting;
- 12) Start to immediately explore resource needs and funding beyond the potential BCT extension. Funding to continue the work is fundamental post-BCT.
- 13) The OGN should take the next 18 months to review and update its structure to ensure the independence of the Network from both Building Change Trust and NIEL as a provider of secretarial support. The OGN will need to develop an identity and governance structure of its own.
- 14) Review the steering committee membership and skills, and develop new induction processes. This may be beneficial for existing steering committee members as well as new ones.
- 15) Approach Building Change Trust for a renewal of funding until 2018, and work to identify with BCT how the Network can best contribute to the promotion of the legacy of the Trust in 2018 and after.

Appendix A

Targets and Status



No.	Outputs	Status	Comment
General			
1	Appoint and brief an OGN Network co-ordinator	●	NIEL were appointed in March 2015 to provide administrative and management support to the Open Government Network. They were appointed after an open and transparent tendering process.
2	Establish an OGN co-ordinator and set up an OGN cost centre/secretariat	●	NIEL employed a full-time co-ordinator for the OGN although it also allocated other staff members to the Network. The co-ordinator changed during the life-time of the contract as agreed by the BCT and OGN steering committee. A separate cost centre was established.
3	Project inception meeting with BCT and the Steering Committee	●	The meeting was held at CFNI and included most of the initial Open Government Network Steering Committee. The inaugural meeting also included participation by Involve representatives by Skype from London to help link with the UK action plan.
4	Co-ordinate Steering Committee strategy day to review and re-prioritise the OGN Action Plan	●	The strategy day was held near the start of the NIEL support contract in June 2015. A work plan was produced for the 18-months ahead. The strategy day included some changes to the focus of the strategic plan especially in relation to membership. Focus shifted to particular aspects of the strategy, especially commitments for the next action plan. Some aspects were re-prioritised.
5	Liaise with BCT on appointment of Chair and Vice Chair	●	A chair and vice chair was initially elected by members of the embryonic Network and Steering Committee. The chair has remained in place for the two years of the existence of the Open Government Network. It was decided not to appoint a specific vice chair in the second year but members of the Steering Committee would deputise for the chair as needed.
6	Co-ordinate monthly steering committee meetings	●	There have been monthly meetings of the steering committee. New elections to the steering committee were also held and several new members elected to replace members that left during the first year.

No.	Outputs	Status	Comment
7	Consider sub-groups to focus on membership, communications and government engagement	●	Sub committees of the Steering Committee were established and oversaw working focusing on the development of membership and communication material which was of high quality. Keeping such voluntary sub-committees going was always going to be problematic. A communications and social media policy was also produced through a sub-committee.
8	Undertake a quarterly review of the OGN action plan	●	A quarterly review has been undertaken as part of regular updates to Building Change Trust as well as oversight role performed by the Open Government Network Steering Committee.
Growing the Network			
9	Finalise terms of membership for OGN with the steering committee	●	The Steering Committee agreed terms of membership at its first meeting to include locally elected representatives and others from civil society but not Ministers or senior civil servants. The aim of the distinction was to maintain independence of the work and its membership from those responsible for policy-making, while still welcoming participation by everyone include those with decision-making responsibilities.
10	Develop an OGN membership and communications strategy and launch a membership drive	●	A membership strategy was developed and implemented. The Network membership has increased substantially in the last two years though a specific membership drive was not undertaken. The issue of legitimacy is linked to the strength of membership and evidence of significant participation. A recruitment event was held with the environment sector in September 2015 and another explored with Rural Community Network. Ongoing efforts were made through distribution of the leaflet and social media presence as well as presence at events. The Network also targeted membership profiles such as older people and younger, rural and in different sectors.
11	Develop OGN promotional literature	●	A promotional video was produced and social media presence. A leaflet was produced outlining the reason for the establishment of the Open Government Network, its main initiatives and contact details. The video has been used at

No.	Outputs	Status	Comment
			a number of events and has been watched on-line by over 200 viewers on You Tube
12	Launch an OGN website	●	The OGN steering committee decided to piggy back the website on the Open Government Network UK website, hoping it would add to interest and traffic through the overall UK website. There are also links to the Scotland and Wales Open Government Networks. The website has hosted a variety of updates and blogs.
13	Compile and manage OGN membership database	●	The membership database is managed through the Open Government Partnership website. There are over 200 members. There are many more who engage with the Network more loosely on Twitter and Facebook.
14	Co-ordinate calendar of recruitment events to target specific groups	●	A number of events were held and membership has increased. Participants were made aware of membership opportunities during the outreach, awareness and knowledge based events organised by the Network. The Network may wish to explore this indicator further in the next two years.
15	Grow OGN on Twitter, Facebook	●	The OGN has established a credible Twitter following of 1,130 (March 2017) compared to, for example, 1,753 for the UK-wide Open Government Network Twitter feed, 584 for the Local Government Open Data feed for the OGP Paris summit, 1,752 for Democratic Society Scotland. Given the relative newness of the OGN in Northern Ireland and the relative size and catchment of Northern Ireland it is a very creditable number of followers. It has also achieved 164 Likes on Facebook with 157 followers.
16	Develop an OGN film for use at workshops and other platforms	●	The film was produced and has received 209 views on You Tube. It has been used by OGN at various events. The film was deliberately provocative. The OGN could promote it more through social media. A copy of the film is accessible here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUIKgU2w978

No.	Outputs	Status	Comment
17	Co-ordinate guest bloggers on a monthly basis	●	There have been a range of updates and blogs on the website. Ten blogs have been hosted on the website in the seven months from July 2016 to March 2017, meeting the blogging target. Blogs have included several Slugger O'Toole blogs on open government and several other blogs by Steering Committee members.
Develop Knowledge and Vision			
18	Open letter to OFMdFM to raise awareness	●	An open letter to the First Minister and deputy First Minister was written and published. It sought to develop positive working relationships with government, departments and agencies on open government and the development of future NI commitments in the UK action plan.
19	Correspondence with all MLAs, Councillors, Departments to raise awareness	●	The OGN did enter in to correspondence with MLAs and Councillors to raise awareness of the work of the Network. The correspondence did not include all locally elected representatives but the communication did raise awareness. However, the Network may wish to reflect on the need for more sustained, significant communication with elected representatives in the years going forward.
20	Undertake research on international good practice on open government	●	There has been significant liaison on open government with others involved in open government work on these islands and in Europe. The Network has published examples of good practice on open government. While not undertaken directly by the Network they have utilised research already undertaken and are working on issues in practice.
21	OGN member events exploring aspects of open government	●	A number of OGN events have been organised for members and the general public many of which have been referenced in the body of the report. OGN events were advertised with several VCSE organisations including RCN, NICVA, TASC and the Centre for Cross Border Studies. Events included an open data seminar, membership events at Belfast City Hall, participatory budgeting events a youth democracy day event with Belfast Metropolitan College and several others.

No.	Outputs	Status	Comment
22	Liaise with UK and Ireland partners, attend events and explore joint campaigns	●	There has been a strong relationship with civil society partners in the UK, partly due to the relationship between Involve and DemSoc through The CSCT BCT programme, which Involve and DemSoc support. The relationship with partners in Ireland has been less strong but has been renewed in recent months. It may be a reinvigorated feature of the OGN work going forward, linking to open government partners in both the UK and Ireland. The Network also attended open government events and conferences outside Northern Ireland – in Mexico, Paris and England. The promotion of good practice in Northern Ireland to a wider international audience may be an important aspect of raising its profile and presence at these events.
23	Engage with NILGA and new Councils	●	The OGN has been in communication with NILGA and presented to the NILGA management board. There has been some communication with Councils through provision of information. The OGN may wish to develop this further, including exploring some participatory activities with them possibly through Community Planning processes.
24	Co-ordinate annual OGN conference	●	The idea in the initial action plan and strategy for an annual open government conference was dropped to prioritise other areas of work and because the OGN perceived insufficient local interest. Members have participated in other open data and open government focused events and conferences both in Northern Ireland and outside.
Increase Civic Participation in Decision Making			
25	Open dialogue and communication with DFP	●	As highlighted in the main body of the report the Open Government Network has engaged extensively with the DFP especially in the last year, in developing the Northern Ireland commitments approved by the NI Executive and now part of the regional commitments in the UK action plan. The impetus was provided when the Minister engaged. It is not clear what, if any, impact there will be with no Minister in place after the recent election.

No.	Outputs	Status	Comment
26	Engage with open data team and NI assembly outreach team	●	There has been a close working relationship with the open data project based at NICVA and also with open data specialists in the Assembly and DFP as well as other departments. Specific events have been held by the Network, in partnership with others, focusing on open data.
27	Attend political party conferences	●	The OGN has engaged extensively with politicians, Councillors and MLAs, party leaders during the last two years. It has received direct commitments on transparency from political leaders and commitment from the Northern Ireland Executive. It has also got in principal commitments from some local authorities for participatory budgeting pilots. While it may not have attended political party conferences – and cost may have been a factor – it has found alternative methods of engaging with politicians. Meetings have been held with all of the main political parties and the Network has given evidence at a number of committees at Stormont. However, awareness is still not high within elected representatives so it is an issue the Network may wish to reflect on for future years.
28	Engage DFP and co-ordinate OGN participation in innovation hub	●	The DfP and OFMdfM (The Executive Office TEO) were engaged in participating in an Innovation Lab. The OGN suggested a citizen's budget as a topic for an Innovation Lab but were informed by the Departments that little appetite existed for such an initiative prior to the Assembly election in 2016. Subsequent to that the Minister for Finance announced commitment to a citizen's budget.
29	Target NI elections in OGN communications strategy and link to manifestos	●	The Open Government Network was engaged in local and Assembly elections in 2015, 2016 and 2017. Members participated in open data activities to ensure count statistics were made available to as many people as possible using social media.
Increase Transparency			

No.	Outputs	Status	Comment
30	Co-ordinate steering committee and member workshops on open data	●	Some workshops on open data have been held although the Open Government Network has also worked with NICVA and The Detail data project to explore more aspects of the meaning and benefits of open data.
31	Produce report on benefits of open data for NI	●	A number of workshops have been held highlighting the benefits of open data, and the Network has worked closely with the open data project at NICVA. The benefits of open data have been a prominent part of the work to date.
32	Pilot live streaming with 2-3 Councils	●	The Open Government Network has developed a relationship with some Councils but has not engaged in live streaming of Council meetings, partly because some Councils do that and partly given time issues and dependence on a voluntary Steering Committee. The Network has organised lived tweeting from a Council meeting.
33	Launch open data campaign on party political donations	●	The Network has engaged on the issue of party political donations and in the March 2017 election managed to get written commitments from most of the main political parties to openness in political party donations. The issue gained significant social media and mainstream media interest during the campaign. The Network published the responses from the political parties outlining their support for openness in political party donations contrary to existing Northern Ireland rules.
Improve Standards of Integrity in Public, Political and Civic Life			
34	Engage with MLAs/Minister to establish an all-party working group on open government	●	There was engagement with political parties, many MLAs and elected representatives of local authorities. This has led to participation by many elected representatives in Open Government Network activities. However, the Steering Committee decided not to establish an all-party working group on open government.
35	Establish and support an all-party working group	●	An all-party working group on open government was not established. The OGN considered there to be other priorities and there was less interest than they would have expected from MLAs. The Network will keep an open mind for the potential of an all-party Assembly working group in the future.

No.	Outputs	Status	Comment
36	Launch OGN awards competition and co-ordinate an awards ceremony	●	The Steering Committee decided not to action this element of the action plan partly due to insufficient good practice identified to date and partly due to demands on the administration and management team with other aspects of the action plan and strategy.
37	Scope possible common commitments areas between OGN and local/central government	●	The Network has worked extensively with government to explore commitments and common areas of agreement and work. Most time in 2016 was spent working with central government relating to the open government commitments eventually agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive and by the Department of Finance. Some movement was also possible with local government such as commitment in principal by Ards and North Down Borough Council to agree to a participatory budgeting exercise and nascent interest from Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council or/and Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council in a participatory budgeting exercise.
38	Explore opportunities to develop OG forum for members and politicians to engage on OG issues	●	The wide range and number of events to which politicians have been invited has been significant. Opportunity for political representatives to get involved has been significant although awareness still needs raised within the political and elected representative sphere.
39	Independent evaluation and impact assessment	●	Currently being completed of which this evaluation report is part. It is hoped that the evaluation will help shape further support from Building Change Trust for the Network through to 2018.

Appendix B

Consultations and Consultees

Surname	First Name	Organisation
Focus group with the OGN Steering Committee		
Participation in Belfast Met Participatory Decision-Making Workshop		
Participation in Democracy Day		
Participation in BCT working group on CSCT		
Agnew	Steven	Green Party/MLA
Barry	Professor John	Councillor and QUB
Bell	Jonathan	NIEL
Braithwaite	Paul	Building Change Trust
Burns	Colm	Chair, OGN
Clifford	Kate	Rural Community Network
Dorrian	Cllr George	DUP/councillor
Ebyn	Karin	Corrymeela
Fitzsimmons	Sam	Integrated Education Fund
Foster	Carol	NIEL
Gillespie	Elaine	Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon District Council
Hughes	Tim	Involve

Huston	Felicity	Former steering committee member
Keenan	Alison	Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council
Keys	Libby	Building Change Trust
Leonard	Allan	Fact Check NI
Lockhart	Carla	DUP MLA
McBurney	David	NIEL/Open Government Network
McCracken	Andrew	Community Foundation Northern Ireland
McKinney	Nigel	Building Change Trust
McVey	Joe	Building Change Trust
Molloy	Kieran	Cedar Foundation
O'Kane	Louise	Community Places
O'Muilleoir	Mairtin	Sinn Fein/MLA/Minister
O'Neill	Pete	Imagine Festival
Thornbury	Andrea	NICVA
Webster	Niamh	DemSoc
Yasin	Arfawn	Advice NI